DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 474 860 CG 032 309

AUTHOR	Snyder, Howard N.; Espiritu, Rachele C.; Huizinga, David; Loeber, Rolf; Petechuk, David
TITLE	Prevalence and Development of Child Delinquency. Child Delinquency Bulletin Series.
INSTITUTION	Department of Justice, Washington, DC. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
REPORT NO	NCJ-193411
PUB DATE	2003-03-00
NOTE	10p.
AVAILABLE FROM	OJJDP, 810 Seventh Street, NW, Washington, DC 20531. Tel: 202-307-5911; Fax: 202-307-2093; e-mail: Askjj@ncjrs.org; Web site: http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/. For full text: http://www.ncjrs.org/ pdffiles1/ojjdp/193411.pdf
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents; *Children; *Delinquency; Delinquency Prevention; *Early Intervention; *Incidence; *Juvenile Justice; Predictor Variables; Violence

ABSTRACT

The number of child delinquents entering the juvenile justice system is increasing, as evidenced by rising arrest rates and court caseloads. Compared with adolescents who become involved in delinquency in their teens, child delinquents between the ages of 7 and 12 have a two- to threefold greater risk of becoming serious, violent, and chronic offenders. Child delinquents consume a disproportionately large amount of the resources of schools, the juvenile justice system, and child welfare and mental health agencies. To better determine the prevalence of child delinquency, information about the types of delinquent acts committed, and how the juvenile justice system deals with child delinquency, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Study Group on Very Young Offenders (the Study Group) focused on two sources of data. The Study Group looked at a wide range of official reports, from juvenile arrest data to how the courts specifically handle child delinquency cases. It also studied self-report data gathered from children and young adolescents to enhance the information obtained from official records and shed more light on what is believed to be a substantial number of offenses committed by child delinquents that never come to the attention of the police or the courts. The information presented in this Bulletin provides a basis for bringing some of the issues into focus. The longterm goal is to use this information to foster effective interventions that target very young children before they accumulate multiple offenses and develop a pattern of chronic offending. (GCP)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 474 860

Prevalence and Development of Child Delinquency

by
Howard N. Snyder
Rachele C. Espiritu
David Huizinga
Rolf Loeber
David Petechuk

Child Delinquency Bulletin Series
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CG032309

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

CHILD delinquency
Bulletin Series

J. Robert Flores, Administrator

March 2003

A Message From OJJDP

As noted in this Bulletin, an increasing number of very young offenders, those between the ages of 7 and 12, are becoming involved with the juvenile justice system. According to the latest statistics, children younger than 13 are involved in almost 1 in 10 juvenile arrests. These youth account for more than one-third of juvenile arrests for arson and nearly one-fifth of juvenile arrests for sex offenses and vandalism.

Compared with juveniles who become involved in delinquency in adolescence, very young delinquents are at greater risk of becoming serious, violent, and chronic offenders. They are also more likely than older delinquents to continue their delinquency for extended periods of time. Consequently, over their lifetimes, these offenders may pose a disproportionate threat to persons and property. In addition, these offenders have the potential to place significant demands on the funds and resources of educational, justice, and social services agencies.

The good news is that prevention and intervention efforts focused on very young offenders could yield significant benefits. For these benefits to be realized, however, the unique challenges posed by these offenders must be addressed before their delinquency escalates.

Prevalence and Development of Child Delinquency

Howard N. Snyder, Rachele C. Espiritu, David Huizinga, Rolf Loeber, and David Petechuk

Sparked by high-profile cases involving children who commit violent crimes, public concerns regarding child delinquents have escalated. Compared with juveniles whose delinquent behavior begins later in adolescence, child delinquents (offenders younger than age 13) face a greater risk of becoming serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders. OJJDP formed the Study Group on Very Young Offenders to examine the prevalence and frequency of offending by children younger than 13. This Study Group identified particular risk and protective factors that are crucial to developing effective early intervention and protection programs for very young offenders.

This Bulletin is part of OJJDP's Child Delinquency Series, which presents the findings of the Study Group on Very Young Offenders. This series offers the latest information about child delinquency, including analyses of child delinquency statistics, insights into the origins of very young offending, and descriptions of early intervention programs and approaches that work to prevent the development of delinquent behavior by focusing on risk and protective factors.

The number of child delinquents entering the juvenile justice system is increasing, as evidenced by rising arrest rates and court caseloads. Compared with adolescents who become involved in delinquency in their teens, child delinquents between the ages of 7 and 12 have a two- to threefold greater risk of becoming serious, violent, and chronic offenders.[1] Child delinquents tend to have longer offending careers than juveniles who become delinquent at a later age; as a result, these children will constitute a disproportionate threat to public safety and property (Loeber and Farrington, 2001). They consume a disproportionately large amount of the resources of schools, the juvenile justice system, and child welfare and mental health agencies.

To better determine the prevalence of child delinquency, information about the types of delinquent acts committed, and how the juvenile justice system deals with child delinquency, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Study Group on Very Young Offenders (the Study Group) focused on two sources of data. The Study Group looked at a wide range of

[1] Chronic offenders are defined here as those who have been referred to juvenile court at least four times.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

official reports, from juvenile arrest data (including murders by very young children) to how the courts specifically handle child delinquency cases. It also studied self-report data gathered from children and young adolescents to enhance the information obtained from official records and shed more light on what is believed to be a substantial number of offenses committed by child delinquents that never come to the attention of the police or the courts.

The Study Group focused on three categories of children:

- Serious child delinquents who have committed one or more of the following acts: homicide, aggravated assault, robbery, rape, or serious arson.
- Other child delinquents (excluding serious delinquents).
- Children showing persistent disruptive behavior (including truancy and incorrigibility), who are at risk of offending.

Little information exists about critical issues surrounding early-onset delinquency. For example, not all very young delinquents become chronic offenders. A key question is who will become a chronic offender and under what conditions. The information presented in this Bulletin provides a basis for bringing some of the issues into focus. The long-term goal is to use this information to foster effective interventions that target very young children before they accumulate multiple offenses and develop a pattern of chronic offending.

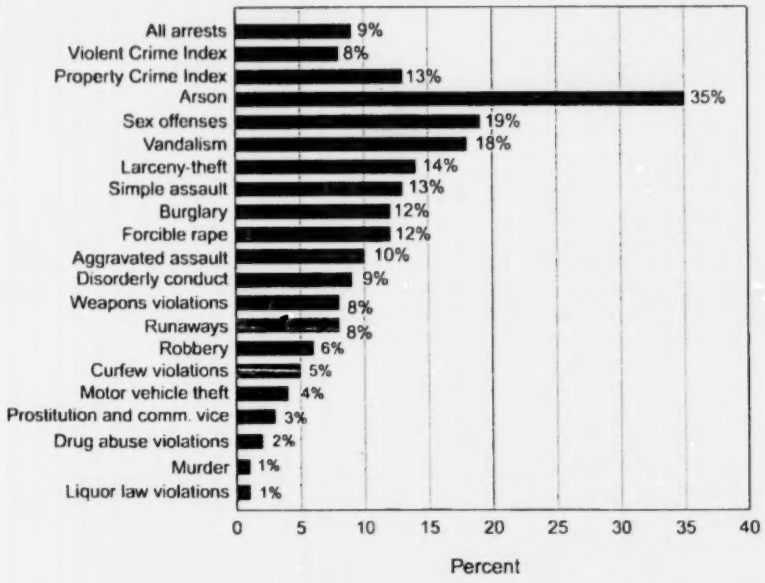
Official Records on Children in the Juvenile Justice System

Very young juveniles (those younger than 13) are fairly common in the U.S. juvenile justice system (Snyder, 2001).[2] Although some of these children are referred directly to the court by family members, schools, or social services agencies, the first contact for most children is an arrest by law enforcement. Data collected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) Uniform Crime Reporting Program show that law enforcement agencies made approximately 253,000 arrests of children younger than 13 in 1997 (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999); about 10 percent of these arrests were for status offenses (e.g., running away from home, curfew violations, and liquor law violations). Overall, children younger than 13 made up 9 percent of all juvenile arrests (i.e., arrests of persons younger than 18) in 1997 (see figure 1 and the table).

From 1988 to 1997, arrests of very young juveniles for property crimes dropped 17 percent, while arrests for

[2] Unless otherwise indicated, all data in this section are from this source.

Figure 1: Proportions of Juvenile Arrests Involving Persons Younger Than 13 in 1997



Source: Snyder, 2001.

Definitions

Child delinquents are not legally defined in the same way across the United States (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999; Wiig, 2001). Many States do not have a legally defined age of criminal responsibility (i.e., minimum age of arrest) for children; however, according to common law, the minimum age is 7 (Griffin, Torbert, and Szymanski, 1998). The minimum age varies from age 6 in North Carolina to age 10 in Arkansas, Colorado, Kansas, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. Canada has a minimum age of 12, with a minimum age of 14 for juvenile referral to adult court. The minimum age in England is 10. The Study Group on Very Young Offenders defined child delinquents as juveniles between the ages of 7 and 12, inclusive, who had committed a delinquent act—that is, an act that would be a crime if committed by an adult. The Study Group defined disruptive nondelinquent behavior as a recurrent pattern of negativistic, defiant, disobedient, and hostile behavior toward others lasting at least 6 months during childhood and adolescence (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table: Arrests of Juveniles Younger Than 13 in 1997

	Arrest Estimates				
	Younger Than 13	Younger Than 10	Ages 10–12	Percentage Ages 10–12	Percentage Female
Total	**253,100**	**42,700**	**210,300**	**83**	**24**
Violent Crime Index	**10,700**	**1,700**	**9,000**	**84**	**14**
Murder and nonnegligent manslaughter	<50	<10	<50	82	5
Forcible rape	700	100	500	83	3
Robbery	2,600	300	2,300	88	11
Aggravated assault	7,400	1,300	6,200	83	17
Property Crime Index	**91,200**	**14,600**	**76,600**	**84**	**26**
Burglary	16,400	3,300	13,100	80	12
Larceny-theft	68,900	9,900	59,000	86	31
Motor vehicle theft	2,500	200	2,300	92	18
Arson	3,400	1,200	2,200	64	9
Other Offenses					
Other assaults	30,600	5,000	25,600	84	23
Forgery and counterfeiting	200	<50	200	76	32
Fraud	500	200	400	69	33
Embezzlement	<50	<10	<50	75	31
Stolen property buying, receiving, possessing	2,200	200	1,900	89	13
Vandalism	25,100	6,300	18,700	75	10
Weapons carrying, possessing, etc.	4,400	800	3,600	83	12
Prostitution and commercialized vice	<50	<50	<50	59	24
Sex offenses (except forcible rape and prostitution)	3,300	800	2,500	76	9
Drug abuse violations	4,500	500	4,000	89	22
Gambling	100	<10	100	96	4
Offenses against the family and children	1,000	300	700	70	37
Driving under the influence	100	100	<50	23	18
Liquor law violations	2,000	300	1,700	86	39
Drunkenness	400	100	200	63	25
Disorderly conduct	20,700	2,500	18,200	88	24
Vagrancy	200	<50	100	80	15
All other offenses (except traffic)	31,100	6,300	24,800	80	23
Suspicion	100	<50	100	80	15
Curfew and loitering law violations	9,300	800	8,500	91	29
Runaways	15,700	2,100	13,500	86	48

Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Snyder, 2001.

violent crimes increased 45 percent. Very young juveniles arrested in 1997 were much more likely to be charged with a violent crime, weapons offense, or drug violation than those arrested in 1988. Between 1988 and 1997, arrests for simple assaults increased 79 percent, weapons law violations increased 76 percent, drug abuse violations increased 165 percent, and curfew violations increased 121 percent.

Homicide

Murders by child delinquents (those age 12 and younger) are relatively rare. According to the FBI's Supplementary Homicide Reports, a juvenile offender (i.e., a person younger than 18) was involved in about 27,000 of the approximately 386,000 murders in the United States between 1980 and 1997 (Snyder, 2001). On average, during this same period, approximately 30 murders per year were committed by offenders younger than 13. More than half (54 percent) of the murder victims of child delinquents were killed with a firearm, and more than one-third (38 percent) of the murder victims were also younger than 13. The following data provide a snapshot of very young juvenile murderers:

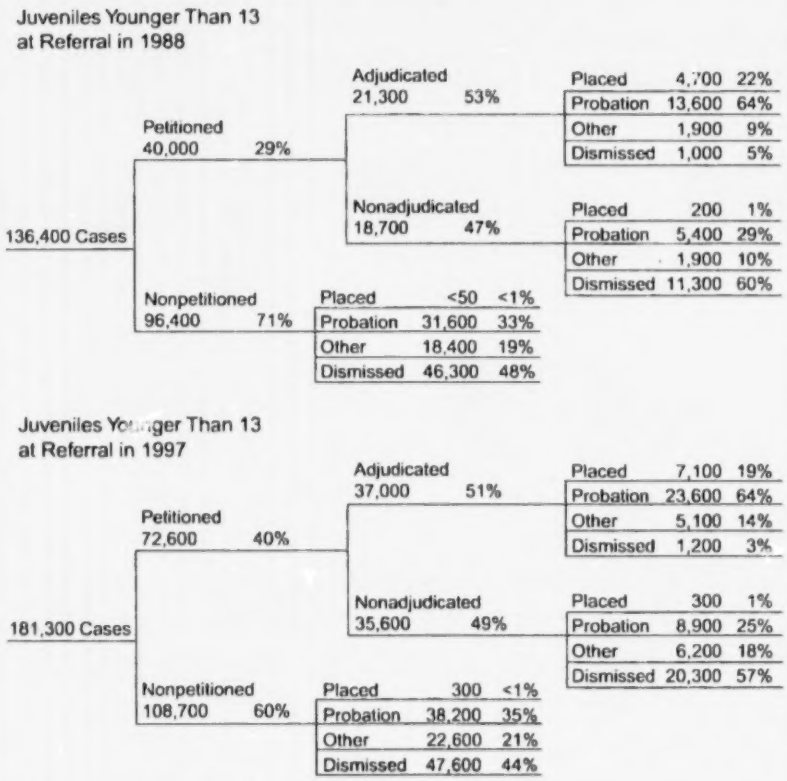
- Fifty-two percent were 12 years old.
- Twenty-two percent were 11 years old, and the remaining 26 percent were 10 or younger.
- Eighty-four percent were male.
- Forty-eight percent were white and 50 percent were black. The other murders were committed by American Indian or Asian youth.

Juvenile Court Referrals

According to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, an estimated 181,300 delinquency cases in 1997 involved offenders who were younger than 13 at the time of court intake. In the 10 years between 1988 and 1997, a substantial change occurred in both the number and the type of child delinquents referred to juvenile court for processing. The number of cases disposed by juvenile courts that involved child delinquents increased 33 percent (see figure 2), far more than the corresponding 6-percent increase in their arrests, indicating that law enforcement agencies and other sources were referring a larger percentage of child delinquents who had been arrested to juvenile courts. In 1997, 57 percent of cases

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

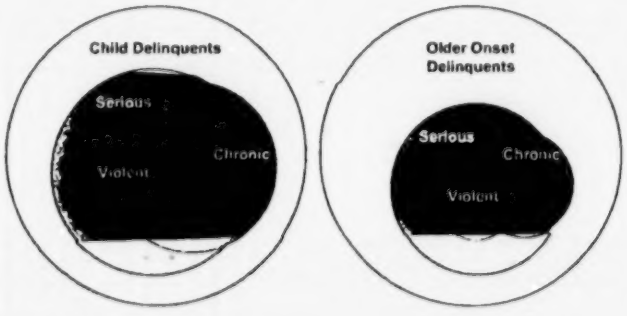
Figure 2: Juvenile Court Processing of Delinquency Cases Involving Juveniles Younger Than 13: 1988 and 1997



Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Source: Snyder, 2001.

Figure 3: Very Young Offenders Have a Greater Percentage of Serious, Violent, and Chronic Careers Than Older Onset Delinquents



Source: Snyder, 2001.

involving child delinquents were property offenses, 29 percent were violent offenses or other offenses against a person, 12 percent were offenses against the public order, and 2 percent were drug law violations.

Juveniles whose first referral to court for a delinquency offense had occurred before age 13 were far more likely to become chronic offenders—that is, to have had at least four referrals to juvenile court—than juveniles whose first referral had occurred when they were older. In addition, compared with juveniles who began their court careers after age 12, these child delinquents were also more likely to become serious and violent offenders (see figure 3).

The proportion of female child delinquents rose from 17 percent in 1988 to 22 percent in 1997. In addition, the juvenile court referral rate for very young black juveniles in 1997 was approximately three times the referral rate for white juveniles. The increase in juvenile court cases of child delinquents was greater for nonwhite juveniles (41 percent) than white juveniles (28 percent), indicating an increasing racial disparity in juvenile court referrals over this 10-year period. Although the offense profile of child delinquents differed little for males and females, the offense profiles of white and nonwhite youth did differ. For example, nonwhite youth were slightly more likely to be charged with a person offense (32 percent versus 27 percent) and slightly less likely to be charged with a property offense (54 percent versus 59 percent).

Determining whether the changes discussed above reflect changes in children's behavior, in society, or in the prosecution practices within the juvenile justice system is difficult. Nevertheless, the number of child delinquents entering the juvenile justice system is increasing, as evidenced by rising arrest rates and court caseloads.

How the Courts Respond to Child Delinquents

As expected, juvenile courts respond very differently to offenders younger than 13 than to older juveniles. For example, between 1988 and 1997, the likelihood of detention between referral and court disposition was much less for children age 12 and younger (10 percent) than for older juveniles (21 percent). Juvenile courts were also more likely to handle informally cases involving child delinquents than they were cases involving older juveniles. However, from 1988 to 1997, U.S. juvenile courts intervened significantly in the lives of a growing number of very young juvenile offenders. For example, the proportion of formally handled cases involving this age group increased from 29 percent to 40 percent. In addition, the number of cases involving a child delinquent that resulted in formal court-ordered probation increased 73 percent.

Although boys and girls had similar offense profiles, young males were more likely to be formally processed than young females (42 percent versus 34 percent), to be adjudicated delinquent if petitioned (52 percent versus 46 percent), and slightly more likely to be ordered to out-of-home placement (20 percent versus 17 percent). As a result, while four times as many boys as girls were referred to juvenile court between 1988 and 1997, six times as many boys as girls were ordered to residential placement, and five times as many boys were placed on formal probation.

Racial minorities were overrepresented at almost every stage in the juvenile justice system. Although nonwhite youth constituted about 20 percent of the U.S. juvenile population in 1997, they were involved in 37 percent of court cases of juveniles younger than 13. Court cases of nonwhite juveniles were more likely to involve detention while the youth were awaiting court disposition (16 percent versus 7 percent) and more likely to be placed on the court docket (45 percent versus 37 percent). Although equal proportions of white and nonwhite juveniles were adjudicated delinquent, nonwhite juveniles were more likely to be ordered to out-of-home placement (23 percent versus 17 percent).

From 1988 to 1997, placement of all child delinquents (regardless of sex and/or race) in residential facilities increased 49 percent. In 1997, about 23,000 child delinquents were placed on formal, court-ordered probation and about 7,000 were placed in a residential facility (see figure 2). An increasing number of child delinquents are being brought before the courts charged with serious delinquent offenses and courts are now more likely to impose formal sanctions.

Self-Report Data

Self-report data from children and young adolescents enhance information based on official records. Previous developmental and epidemiological studies using self-report measures have indicated that young people are willing to report accurate information about committing both minor and serious delinquent acts (Espiritu et al., 2001).

The Study Group found only seven studies that examined delinquency in children and adolescents and that also included the self-reported prevalence or incidence of delinquency in children age 12 and younger (Espiritu et al., 2001). This reflects the limited amount of published epidemiological information available on child offenders. For example, only two studies (the Denver Youth Survey and the Pittsburgh Youth Study) provided prevalence rates for very young children (i.e., respondents between the ages of 7 and 10). These two studies, however, are based on high-risk urban samples. Although weighted to provide representative samples of high-risk urban children, they do not provide estimates for general populations or rural areas.

Child Delinquency Research: An Overview

Historically, delinquency studies have focused on later adolescence, the time when delinquency usually peaks. This was particularly true in the 1990s, when most researchers studied chronic juvenile offenders because they committed a disproportionately large amount of crime. Research conducted during this period by OJJDP's Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders concluded that youth referred to juvenile court for their first delinquent offense before age 13 are far more likely to become chronic offenders than youth first referred to court at a later age. To better understand the implications of this finding, OJJDP convened the Study Group on Very Young Offenders in 1998. Its charge was to analyze existing data and to address key issues that had not previously been studied in the literature. Consisting of 16 primary study group members and 23 coauthors who are experts on child delinquency and psychopathology, the Study Group found evidence that some young children engage in very serious antisocial behavior and that, in some cases, this behavior foreshadows early delinquency. The Study Group also identified several important risk factors that, when combined, may be related to the onset of early offending. The Study Group report concluded with a review of preventive and remedial interventions relevant to child delinquency.

The Child Delinquency Bulletin Series is drawn from the Study Group's final report, which was completed in 2001 under grant number 95–JD–FX–0018 and subsequently published by Sage Publications as *Child Delinquents: Development, Intervention, and Service Needs* (edited by Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington). OJJDP encourages parents, educators, and the juvenile justice community to use this information to address the needs of young offenders by planning and implementing more effective interventions.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

According to self-reports from the studies conducted in Denver and Pittsburgh, 14–19 percent of young boys (ages 7–10) engaged in "street offenses" (offenses of social concern, such as stealing more than $50, aggravated assault, and burglary). In general, however, boys reported higher levels of involvement in "other serious offenses," such as stealing less than $50, simple assault, arson, and joyriding (37–41 percent in Pittsburgh, 20–30 percent in Denver). These boys also reported similar or greater levels of involvement in "minor offenses," such as status or public disorder offenses (23–29 percent in Pittsburgh, 13–24 percent in Denver). In the Denver study, girls reported lower rates of delinquency involvement than boys, except for minor offenses; girls were not studied in Pittsburgh.

Findings from several studies revealed that the prevalence of serious offenses committed by 11- to 12-year-olds was fairly consistent, despite differences in sample characteristics, cohort, locale, and methodology. Results indicated that approximately 5–17 percent of 11- to 12-year-old males engaged in one or more types of serious assault. When considered in the context of rates of 2 percent for 7-year-olds and 7 percent for 10-year-olds, these data show that the prevalence of serious assaults increases as age increases. Although rates of serious property offenses were slightly lower for 11- to 12-year-olds, overall statistics show that a substantial number of young people engaged in serious delinquent acts (Espiritu et al., 2001).

Prevalence rates for minor delinquent acts were substantially higher than for serious delinquent acts. Approximately 25 percent of 11- to 12-year-olds reported committing a minor assault at least once. Prevalence rates for minor property acts ranged from 2 to 39 percent in these studies. Overall, the self-reported rates for status and public disorder offenses were much lower. As reported in two national surveys—the 1976 National Youth Survey and the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth—rates for acts of public disorder were 6–9 percent and 4–7 percent, respectively (Espiritu et al., 2001). Although some aspects of delinquency, such as weapons use, have changed over the years, a comparison of the 1976 National Youth Survey and the 1997 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth indicates that the prevalence of delinquent offending among 11- to 12-year-olds appears to have remained relatively the same over the past two decades.

Developmental Aspects of Child Delinquency

Because detailed measures on child delinquency from national surveys are lacking, the Study Group relied on two specialized studies of child populations in different localities within the United States, namely, self-report data from the Denver Youth Survey and Pittsburgh Youth Study. In analyzing these data, the Study Group examined the following aspects of child delinquency: aggression and violence, other offenses, length of involvement in delinquency, delinquency patterns during ages 7–12, and police contact. These aspects are discussed in the following sections.

Aggression and Violence

According to self-report data, some aggressive behavior (hitting, fighting, physically attacking) appeared to be normative during the early ages, when more serious forms of aggression and violence were less common. For example, in Denver and Pittsburgh, 82–88 percent of these samples of high-risk youth reported engaging in some form of aggression or violence before age 13, with roughly 60 percent of Denver children and nearly 80 percent of boys in Pittsburgh reporting these behaviors before age 9. Approximately 24–33 percent reported involvement only in aggression in which no one was injured. The prevalence of minor assaults in which the victim was injured was approximately 50 percent in Denver (57 percent of boys and 40 percent of girls) and 32 percent of boys in Pittsburgh.

How widespread is violence among children? Keeping in mind that the answer depends on how aggression and violence are defined, initial involvement in serious violence generally does not occur until ages 11–12 or later, and prevalence rates typically decline as the seriousness of violence increases. Only about 5 percent of children in Denver (9 percent of boys and 3 percent of girls) and 7 percent of boys in Pittsburgh were involved in serious violence by age 12. However, in the studies noted, the vast majority of both boys and girls were involved in less serious forms of aggression.

Other Offenses

As compared to their participation in aggression and violence, children reported substantially less involvement in other types of offenses by age 12.

Influence of Older, Deviant Juveniles

Older juveniles often influence younger children. In addition, studies have shown that juveniles who associate with deviant peers are more likely to be involved in delinquent behavior and arrested at a younger age than those who do not associate with such deviant juveniles (Coie et al., 1995). Therefore, it is important to note that, in 1997, the vast majority of very young offenders held in juvenile facilities were housed with older juveniles. Only 1 percent of residents age 12 and younger were in facilities that held no teenagers, and 96 percent were in facilities with juveniles age 15 and older. These very young offenders were placed in situations that brought them in contact with older, deviant juveniles, thereby increasing the likelihood that these young offenders would continue their involvement in delinquent behavior.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Among boys, self-reports of offenses in Denver and Pittsburgh included theft (38 percent in Denver and 56 percent in Pittsburgh), property damage (31 percent in Denver and 54 percent in Pittsburgh), status offenses (19 percent in Denver and 39 percent in Pittsburgh), burglary (6 percent in Denver and 8 percent in Pittsburgh), and arson (8 percent in Denver and 9 percent in Pittsburgh). Overall, rates were lower for girls than for boys. As with aggression, initiation of involvement in other offenses was spread fairly evenly across ages 7–12. The use of alcohol and marijuana was an exception, with a higher rate of initiation in 11- to 12-year-olds.

Length of Involvement

Self-report information from childhood through adolescence indicated that a good deal of involvement in delinquency was limited to childhood. For example, about half of the Denver children (49 percent) who initiated minor violence in which the victim was injured were involved in this activity for 2 years or less. For the other half, however, involvement in most forms of delinquency continued for 5 years or more. In terms of serious violence, a large proportion (40 percent) were involved for 2 years or less, with about 35 percent involved for 3–4 years and 25 percent involved for 5 years or more. Similar findings held for most other offenses (with the exception of status offenses and drug use), with involvement generally limited to childhood for 75 percent or more of juveniles.

Patterns During Ages 7–12

The Study Group found that about 33 percent of children in Denver and Pittsburgh reported no involvement in minor violence (with some level of injury), property offenses, or drug use. About 29 percent reported involvement in only one general type of offense and 38 percent engaged in multiple offenses. In Denver, the most common pattern included both minor violence and property offenses, involving about 70 percent of multiple offenders; more than half of these juveniles also used drugs. Violence and drug use formed the most common pattern in Pittsburgh.

Police Contact

In Denver, a substantial number of the high-risk children reported contact with the police by age 12. Prevalence of police contact increased with age (4 percent at ages 7–8, 7 percent at ages 9–10, and 11 percent at ages 11–12), and boys were more likely than girls to be contacted by the police for delinquency. According to the Denver data, most police contacts were for simple assaults and theft, followed by vandalism, trespassing, weapons violations, and other offenses such as status offenses and civil violations. Children ages 7–10 contacted by police were commonly taken home or to a social services agency. However, more than half of children ages 11–12 contacted by police for delinquency appeared in court, with court dispositions commonly involving fines, community service, restitution, or probation.

Summary

Most studies of juvenile delinquency over the past two decades have focused on older, serious and violent juvenile offenders. Younger delinquents have been ignored partly because their number is relatively small and their threat is not as immediate. However, whereas the number of very young offenders is small compared with older juveniles, child delinquents present unique challenges that need to be addressed. Intervening before minor offenses become more serious and before the occasional offender becomes a chronic offender is important.

The Study Group's analyses of available studies show that official information on child delinquency is corroborated by self-reports of delinquent behavior. The age of onset and patterns of offending found in these studies provide useful information for the development of prevention and intervention programs for at-risk youth. Studies show that children as young as age 7 are involved in delinquent offenses and that some of them will have lengthy criminal careers. As a result, prevention and intervention programs targeting this young age group may benefit these children.

Although the majority of children have limited involvement in delinquency (1–5 years), a large proportion of children are involved in delinquency during childhood and often begin offending early. The statistics cited in this Bulletin show that the number of child delinquents entering the juvenile justice system is increasing and, in some communities, may be reaching critical mass. Whether this is the result of changes in children's behavior, in families, in society, in prosecution practices, or in all of these factors is uncertain. The mental health and other needs of child delinquents should not be ignored. Their behaviors may greatly affect families and communities. Even modestly successful prevention and intervention programs could yield significant benefits, including reducing the overall level of crime in a community, decreasing the future expenditure of tax dollars, and improving the overall well-being of families, children, and youth in a community.

References

American Psychiatric Association. 1994. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association Press.

Coie, J.D., Miller-Johnson, S., Terry, R., Lochman, J.E., Maumary-Gremaud, A., and Hyman, C. 1995. The influence of deviant peer associations on juvenile offending among African-American adolescents. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Society of Criminology, Boston, MA, November 9–14.

Espiritu, R.C., Huizinga, D., Crawford, A., and Loeber, R. 2001. Epidemiology of self-reported delinquency. In *Child Delinquents: Development, Intervention, and Service Needs*, edited by R. Loeber and D.P. Farrington. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., pp. 47–66.

Griffin, P., Torbert, P., and Szymanski, L. 1998. *Trying Juveniles as Adults in Criminal Court. An Analysis of State Transfer Provisions.* Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Loeber, R., and Farrington, D.P., eds. 2001. *Child Delinquents: Development, Intervention, and Service Needs.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Snyder, H.N. 2001. Epidemiology of official offending. In *Child Delinquents: Development, Intervention, and Service Needs,* edited by R. Loeber and D.P. Farrington. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., pp. 25–46.

Snyder, H.N., and Sickmund, M. 1999. *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report.* Report. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Wiig, J.K. 2001. Legal issues. In *Child Delinquents: Development, Intervention, and Service Needs,* edited by R. Loeber and D.P. Farrington. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., pp. 323–338.

This Bulletin was prepared under grant number 95–JD–FX–0018 from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice.

Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Institute of Justice, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

Acknowledgments

Howard N. Snyder, Ph.D., is Director of Systems Research at the National Center for Juvenile Justice. Rachele C. Espiritu, Ph.D., is a Senior Research Associate at EMT Associates in Folsom, CA. David Huizinga, Ph.D., is a Senior Research Associate at the Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado, Boulder, and Director of the Denver Youth Survey. Rolf Loeber, Ph.D., is Professor of Psychiatry, Psychology, and Epidemiology, University of Pittsburgh, PA; Professor of Developmental Psychopathology, Free University, Amsterdam, Netherlands; and Director of the Pittsburgh Youth Study. David Petechuk is a freelance health sciences writer.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

	This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.
X	This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").